

O'Brien

Beliefs and customs — Folkstuff Copy - 1 17 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street, New York City

DATE April 18

SUBJECT Maritime Folklore

1. Date and time of interview

April 14th

2. Place of interview

National Maritime Union, 11th Avenue and 21st Street

3. Name and address of informant

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4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

National Maritime Union; office of Educational Director. O'Brien was painting the 'traveling libraries', that is, boxes containing sets of books which are picked up by the crews of different ships to be placed on board ship.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street

DATE April 18

SUBJECT Maritime Folklore

WORD FOR WORD

Pride under this system? Don't make me laugh. We're just living a step above the mission stiff. I leave that pride stuff to them long hairs you got in Greenwich Village. You can put pride in the wastebasket as far as I'm concerned. I was born right on the waterfront. I'm

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no yo-ho-ho an' a bottle of sarsparilla adventurer — you know what I mean? I knew it was a friggin phony life the first day I tackled it. My old man worked in this industry. Rigged up the first tow-boom ship on the White Star Line. WHY? MAN, I WAS BORN ON THE WATERFRONT DONCHASEE. I'm in a dif'ren class then these adventurers that goes to sea for the kick in it. Be'in a sailor is no life, it's a friggin unnach'rel life. The seaman knows where he's gonna end up that's what drives him to the bottle. It's an unnach'rel life, y'see. NOW, HERE'S THE REAL STORY AND NO BULL, FELLER. Ninety eight percent of the seamen ain't married. It makes a man high-strung. I'm just goin' off into the sexual line which ain't exactly my line it's a deep subject. But the guy that don't get married is a frigged out article. After years of roamin' around some of 'em try to settle down. It takes 'em years to get used to livin' 2 ashore inna majority of cases an' some of 'em don't ever get used to it nach'r'ly. So the first thing you know you're floatin' back to sea. There's no enticement to hangin' around a furnished room. Hey, here's somethin' you [don' k?] know. Do you know what feels like a ship ashore? It's a jail. You wake up in a bunk an' if it wasn't for the bars you'd think it was a ship. So hep me Jesus there was a friend of mine that was trustee in a jail over in Jersey City. Three quarter bunks — white sheets — an' the deck was spotless. It was more sanitary than half the ships — sanitary as hell. The windows—this was in the trustees mess room — they were like friggin French windows. Conditions was so good I bummed a guy for a shave. A ship is like a jail, the same kinda life in a way; I'm referrin' to the federal type of jail, y'see, where the conditions is improved over the old type of jail. Sure, we've improved conditions on the ships but here's the story on what has retarded the improvin' of conditions.

Do you know the worst type that goes to sea. It's the adventurers, those friggin college boys. Nach'r'ly they don't give a damn, y'see. Rotten grub, unsanitary conditions it's all in the fun y'understand. Strange things happening and so on and so forth. China an, Japan an' the South Seas — why I worked under one skipper that had that type spotted. This skipper was after two kinds on the ship. The first was the licensed man that signs on as an A.B. an' then tries to undermine the officers so's he can get the job.

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Number two if he caught somebody readin' an adventure story that was the end of him. The [Leviathan?] was one of the ships that had so many adventurers on it she just managed to stagger into port. These kids from the various colleges — puttin' up with rotten conditions, lousy grub — see what I mean?

It was fellers like them that put the hammers in American ships, them that sailed for a summer and then graduated from the various colleges.

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WHAT THE HELL DO THEY KNOW ABOUT GOIN' TO SEA? It was the old-timers that really fought. They knew where they were goin' — everybody turning out the same in the end. They knew they were headed for the Bowery. It put some fight in 'em. I never read an honest book about the sea except one. It was by a guy by the name of Dana. The sonofabitch he was word for word. He was friggin legitimate. He was tellin, the truth an' he was talkin' about them old sailing ships but it's still true today the most of it. It was word for word.